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SUBJECT: YEMEN GWOT ASSESSMENT

REF: STATE 60749

Classified By: Ambassador Thomas C. Krajeski for reasons 1.4 b and d.

1. (S) Summary. President Saleh has logged some major CT gains and significantly improved security in Yemen since the post-9/11 forging of the U.S.-Yemen GWOT partnership. Recent successes include: the round-up of an emerging al-Qa'ida cell with plans to target the U.S. Ambassador, prosecution and conviction of the USS Cole and M/V Limburg terrorists, and success in the largest destruction program in the region. There continue to be frequent and troubling lapses in the ROYG's performance, including the release of extremists, failure to share information, and inaction on small arms and light weapons (SA/LW), as Saleh has sought to balance domestic political equities while ensuring that he extracts maximum benefit from the U.S. (read: aid) for his cooperation. The ROYG can be helpful but almost always not as helpful as we would like. It can be frustrating. Friction in the US-ROYG relationship is mitigated by the fact that, in objective terms, we are light-years ahead on core CT issues from where we were before 9/11.

2. (S) We seek to institutionalize the gains of past engagement in order to transform a sometimes reluctant Yemen from an occasional friend into a full-time partner. ROYG CT capabilities are growing, albeit modestly, as a result of USG assistance. Progress will be slow, steady, and dependent on intensive personal relationships built through provision of USG training and equipment. Here is how we propose to improve out cooperation with key ROYG allies in the GWOT.

3. (S) Country Team strategy is to improve the performance and capabilities of Yemeni security organizations to support GWOT efforts. Current USG-ROYG CT priorities are to: improve border and maritime security; control the flow of SA/LW and jihadists from Yemen to support terrorist activities in Iraq, KSA, and the Horn of Africa (HOA); enhance the ROYG's CT unit of choice, the Central Security Forces Counter-terrorism Unit (CSF-CTU); improve the ROYG's ability to target terrorists in Yemen; and, encourage the ROYG to implement much needed economic and democratic reforms.

Background: President Saleh and the GWOT

4. (C) Saleh's decision to join the fight against international terrorism was no doubt influenced by U.S. and coalition boots on the ground in Afghanistan. He continues to see value in an ongoing GWOT partnership, but can be counted on to leverage this cooperation into further U.S. military, security and development assistance. He is a high-maintenance and highly opportunistic operator. Saleh tends to focus on short-term CT solutions, preferring to make tactical decisions than to have a comprehensive policy on CT cooperation.

5. (C) Saleh is a master at balancing competing interests and he weighs any USG CT request against appeasing domestic institutional, tribal and Islamic elements. Saleh's balancing act has slowed or stalled U.S. efforts to elicit GWOT related cooperation. For example, such "internal sensitivities," combined with weak Yemeni financial institutions, are responsible for the ROYG's non-supportive posture on the UN action freezing Sheikh Abdul Majid al-Zindani's assets.

Border Security: Land and Sea

6. (C) The establishment, training and partial equipping of the Yemeni Coast Guard (YCG) is a major U.S. security assistance success and the YCG's initial presence up and down the nation's coastline, focusing on critical points, has improved maritime security. Currently the ports of Aden and Hodeidah are more secure than they were one year ago. However, Yemen's oil terminals in Ras Isa and Bir Ali remain vulnerable to terrorist attacks as the YCG does not have yet have the infrastructure to support patrols near these facilities. The YCG has begun initial monitoring and interdiction of smugglers from the Horn of Africa. The effectiveness of the USG-supported YCG is limited by its small size.

17. (C) Yemen and Saudi Arabia have announced joint efforts to tighten border security, but improvement and application has been limited and uneven. The security of Yemen's land and maritime borders remains a priority concern. Tackling land border security is beyond Yemen's current capacity along its long and largely unregulated boarder with Saudi Arabia. Eight days of joint maneuvers between Yemeni and Saudi military along the eastern border began on March 30 and is an noteworthy, albeit largely symbolic, step. Successful control of the Yemeni-Saudi border will require active buy-in from the ROYG, and we should encourage the KSA to fund border security assistance to Yemen in the context of their border security initiative.

18. (C) Post received 750,000 USD for the EXBS program, and plans to use the funds to provide training and equipment to the seriously under-manned, under-trained, and under-funded Yemeni Border Guards. One of our first goals will be to provide basic training and to facilitate cross-border coordination and information exchange with the Saudis. A mobile training team would be appropriate for providing border guard specific training. In addition to specific training for border guards, MOI has requested tactical vehicles and night vision goggles. For the ROYG to effectively monitor its borders to prevent weapons smuggling and terrorist activities, we must increase support for this program. The ROYG must, in turn, demonstrate sufficient political will to eliminate any official involvement in weapons smuggling.

CT Cooperation with MOI - Success of CSF-CTU

19. (C) The training and equipping of the Ministry of Interior (MOI) Central Security Forces Counter Terrorism Unit (CSF-CTU) is a major USG security assistance program success. The Yemeni Central Security Force (CSF) is a paramilitary counter-terrorism, emergency reaction, and counter-coup force that can provide reinforcement to the Yemeni armed forces. We have been hindered by long-standing Department policy that prohibits using FMF funds on paramilitary forces. Its primary missions are internal security and counter-terrorism operations. Within the CSF, only the Counter-Terrorism Unit (CSF-CTU) is tasked with the primary domestic counter-terrorism mission; no CSF units conduct defense.

110. (S) The USG-trained CSF-CTU proved itself an elite cadre in a fight against the "Believing Youth8 movement founded by slain anti-American Shi'ite cleric Hussein Badr Eddine al-Houthi. Last summer, its conflict was characterized by its long and bloody nature which, like the Abyan conflict in 2003, took the ROYG and its armed forces by surprise. CSF-CTU was redeployed several weeks ago to the same region to put down a resurgence of the al-Houthi insurrection. Employing lessons and skills learned in the interim from USG trainers, reports from the field indicate that in the current fighting CSF-CTU forces are employing techniques to isolate insurgents and limit collateral damage. Sources on the ground currently report that the CSF-CTU are effectively in the lead and working with the armed forces to use appropriate strategy and techniques to fight a well trained enemy unafraid to go on the offense, operate at night, and employ guerrilla tactics.

111. (S) Currently, the ROYG is inclined to employ the CSF-CTU immediately to deal with any serious para-military situation in recognition of the skills they have developed from effective training and from experience gained. Given the small size of this force, 150 soldiers, it cannot sustain more than a dozen or so casualties without a serious degradation of its capabilities. We support the recent request of the CSF to expand its force. Additionally, the country team supports strongly considering a similar proposal by MOD to help train and arm several special forces battalions of the regular army. Having several professional, trained infantry battalions would permit the ROYG to employ them as a first line of defense instead of immediately deploying the elite CSF-CTU.

112. (C) The MOI has sought funding from LEGATT to provide basic services and training for a newly established counter-terrorism investigative unit (CTIU). CT investigations have been predominately conducted by the PSO. The MOI CTIU consists of 100 investigator from MOI's Criminal Investigative Unit and is supervised by Colonel Hisham Ghazani, considered by FBI as "someone we can work with". In December 2004 the CTIU disrupted an AQ cell in the early planning stages of preparing to attack numerous western targets and six suspects were arrested. The CTIU is now working jointly with a team of FBI agents interviewing the perpetrator of an failed attack on the U.S. Ambassador. Country team believes that based on past successes in CT cooperation with MOI and Minister Alimi, there is great potential in strengthening our relationship with the CTIU. LEGATT is the action office, supported by the country team,

in building a strong partner on CT issues.

¶13. (SBU) USG GWOT efforts are hindered by Yemen's rudimentary fingerprint system and lack of a national database to store records. Yemen has no system to maintain this critical biometric data when they are able to capture it, nor do the authorities have the skills to properly record prints or recover them from crime scenes. Working with FBI, country team proposes the development of a searchable fingerprint system base on internationally exchangeable print standards as well as detailed crime scene investigation and evidence collection. A local ability to properly process evidence would be a significant asset to GWOT investigations, as would the creation of a national database of known criminals. FBI is prepared to provide the necessary equipment and training to Yemen, but post is still seeking DOS or other funds to cover the USD 4 million cost for implementing the program over three years.

CT Information Sharing

¶14. (S) The Political Security Organization (PSO) is currently the premier agency charged with CT in Yemen. It is pervasive and paranoid. The head of the PSO, Major General Ghalib al-Gamish is a close confidant to President Saleh. Information sharing with the PSO is problematic, however, despite the fact that it is fully committed to preventing terrorist attacks in Yemen. Gamish has cooperated closely on following several recent terrorist networks involving jihadists from Iraq, and we anticipate that cooperation on these and other CT related issues will continue. We have seen the PSO coordinate with other governments in the region, and it usually takes action swiftly on CT related leads provided by the USG and other governments.

¶15. (S) The ROYG and the PSO have taken stances which are contrary to USG security interests. Specifically, the ROYG has released detainees associated with al-Qa'ida as part of its Ramadan amnesty in the last three years. This year, however, the ROYG for the first time provided Post with an advance list of releasees, and agreed to continue to hold some, but not all, of the terrorism suspects. The ROYG has also been intransigent on allowing USG investigators access to prisoners that we believe to be directly connected to AQ. Not only does the PSO refuse to share information collected on these individuals with the USG, but it insists that it has no information at all, despite holding and interrogating them for months or even years.

¶16. (S) A relatively new organization, the National Security Board (NSB) is headed by Colonel Ammar Saleh, one of three nephews of the President. Western educated, Saleh enjoys contact with many westerners and has worked closely with emboffs on a joint US-ROYG destruction program. His decision making process on CT issues, however, needs maturing. He is often shortsighted and opportunistic, much like his uncle, President Ali Abdullah Saleh. The NSB significantly limits its staff and relies heavily on the PSO to execute operations. Post believes, however, that with time, training, and assistance, the NBS could develop into a useful partner in the GWOT.

Terrorist Financing and Zindani: Need ROYG Action

¶17. (S) Despite nascent efforts to build an effective anti-money laundering regime, the ROYG's capability to stop the flow of money is extremely limited and ROYG officials tend to view terrorist financing as a problem more for regional neighbors than for Yemen. Since the 2003 passage of a money laundering law, Central Bank officials, MFA contacts and representatives of private banks have made repeated requests for U.S. assistance to build their infrastructure. CBY capabilities are minimal and any assistance to build their financial intelligence unit and interagency capabilities would be welcomed.

¶18. (C) As in some other areas of CT cooperation, the ROYG lacks the political will to take action on the freezing of Sheikh Abdul Majid al-Zindani's assets under his designation by the UN as someone giving material support to al-Qaida. The ROYG has used the excuse of requesting legal documentation on Zindani's culpability and Gulf charities mentioned above to delay further action, rather than comply with its responsibilities as a member state.
Krajeski